

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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MARKEY SLAMS BUSH ADMINISTRATION FOR SECURITY CUTBACKS AS NEW THREATS UNCOVERED

Washington, DC: Representative Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security and author of a successful amendment to the Homeland Security spending bill requiring screening of commercial cargo before it is loaded aboard passenger airplanes, which passed by a vote of 278 to 146, today slammed the Bush Administration for opposing the cargo amendment in the Senate and for going ahead with cuts in the number of airport screeners while Al Qaeda devises new tactics for circumventing security measures at airports.

"Today the Homeland Security Department announced that Al Qaeda may try to use cameras, laptops and other common electronic devices to carry out terrorist strikes on airplanes. Apparently, it's not just sleeper cells we need to guard against, but sleeper cell phones as well.

"Over the last several weeks, we've seen a disturbing pattern of missteps and misplaced priorities by the Bush Administration's homeland security team. Intelligence sources gathered information about sophisticated new techniques being developed by Al Qaeda, but the Bush Administration continues to cut airport screeners. The Homeland Security Department warned that terrorists are seeking new ways to defeat enhanced security measures put in place after September 11th, but the Bush Administration continues to ignore a gaping hole in our homeland security program – the failure to screen commercial cargo loaded aboard passenger airlines. Intelligence officials reported possible 9/11-style attacks disguised as hijackings, but the Transportation Security Administration made plans to cut back on air marshals. This is unacceptable.

"When the House of Representatives considered the spending bill for the Homeland Security Department, I attached an amendment to the bill to require that commercial cargo be screened before it is transported on passenger planes. My amendment passed overwhelmingly by a vote of 278 to 146, but the Bush Administration continues to refuse to support it – even though we know from a captured Al Qaeda operative that terrorists consider cargo to be an inviting tool for carrying out their deadly plans.

"I urge the Administration to immediately support the cargo amendment so that it is included in the final version of the homeland security bill. I also call on the Bush Administration to reverse course and stop its ongoing cuts in the number of screeners at airports. As new threats are uncovered, we must ensure we have the tools to prevent terrorist strikes."